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ABSTRACT

This paper by the former president of the University of Liberia on building consensus for higher education reform in Africa begins by identifying three obstacles to reform: (1) lack of understanding of the complex African context which could result in setting the wrong goals for reform; (2) a political situation that inhibits freedom of thought and restricts the political participation of the majority of the continent's people; and (3) the lack of readily available funds to support reform. Approaches to removing these obstacles and facilitating reform are discussed in terms of consultation processes, organizational structures, and management decisions. Five specific management actions are urged: instituting proper financial management; computerizing student records; instituting overall personnel policies; establishing a university relations office; and establishing a planning unit. In addition, the roles of key actors and interest groups students, governments, graduates, other higher education institutions, and international donor agencies are addressed. (Contains 13 references.) (DB)

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Building Consensus for Higher Education Reform in Africa: Some Reflections

by Mary Antoinette Brown Sherman

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BUILDING CONSENSUS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION REFORM IN AFRICA: SOME REFLECTIONS

By

Mary Antoinette Brown Sherman
Former President, University of Liberia

For the

Africa Technical Department
The World Bank

April 30, 1993

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Dr. Mary Antoinette Brown Sherman was President of the University of Liberia from 1978-84. She later served as Visiting Professor at Ohio State University and at Cornell University in the United States, and now works as a consultant in the education field.

This paper was commissioned by the Africa Technical Department of the World Bank as part of a regional study on African higher education managed by William Saint. It is disseminated as input to the growing discussion concerning the future of African universities. Copies are available on request.

BUILDING CONSENSUS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION REFORM IN AFRICA: SOME REFLECTIONS

Introduction

Universities in Africa are at an exciting juncture in their history. Reminiscent of the heyday of their formative years, they are poised to seize opportunities to emerge from their troubled decades. These decades, marked by political repression meted to them by their own governments and economic hardships which they faced as a result of gross underfunding, were nevertheless decades of expansion in enrollment in response to increasing demands for access.

Africa is experiencing deep crises, despite two United Nations development decades, 1960 to 1980. Changing realities within this period have made apparent the continent's marginal place in the global economy. They have also underscored the urgency for the continent to take a lead in improving its situation. In the ongoing struggle for self-reliance and self-sustained development, the realization that the continent's universities have an important role in this struggle is growing, especially off the continent where only a few years ago there was advocacy by key international funding agencies for increased spending on primary education at the expense of higher education. Accordingly, there is pressure for revitalization of the continent's universities and, in fact, reform of its higher educational systems. Whether the wellbeing of Africa's most precious resource, its people, will be the main focus or modernization and economic development, as conventionally conceived, will depend upon how those initiating reform perceive the African situation and the goals for higher education reform evolved from that perception.

What are the underlying forces which will affect efforts to reform Africa's universities? Who are the people who will be involved in the reform process? What are the institutions and organizations? How will the strategies devised fit in with the continental and international contexts in which these institutions function? Such are the questions and issues which this paper will explore, recognizing that planning for

reform is one major step and implementation of plans another and bigger step.

Obstacles to Higher Education Reform in Africa

University reform, using Philip G. Altbach's definition, is "a process of planned change in higher education" and usually refers to "change of a basic or structural nature."[1] Such planned change Altbach sees as "aimed at improving aspects of the academic environment."[2] I will extend this definition for the African situation to include improvement of the larger environment because of the role higher education should play in pre-industrial societies with respect to political, socio-cultural and technological advancement. Altbach does see higher education in pre-industrial societies as "linked closely to broader social problems."[3]

In Africa, there are several obstacles to higher education reform . To begin with, the context in which Africa's higher educational institutions function is complex. Lack of understanding of this complex context poses a formidable obstacle to reform, for reform goals should be related to the context in which institutions function.

Africa has a marginal place in the global economy. Recent changes in that economy exacerbate this marginality. Needless to say, integration of the African economies is critical to self-sustained development and the improvement of Africa's place in the global economy. The lack of integration in particular of the physical, institutional, and social infrastructures, regarded by the Economic Community for Africa (ECA) as one of the three mutually interdependent dimensions of this integration,[4] has slowed exchange of ideas among African universities and handicapped cooperation among them. The professional continental bodies, especially the Association of African Universities (AAU) which has struggled to foster cooperation among these universities since its founding in 1967, can provide ample evidence of the drawbacks poor communication and transportation have had in this connection.

Introducing another dimension, Africa's universities are part of an international academic system and, to borrow from Philip Altbach, are "peripheral" to that system. One consequence is the considerable external intellectual dominance which impinges on the continent. Among manifestations is the tendency not only for foreign governments, international organizations, and funding agencies, but also African governments, to draw consultants and rely heavily for advice relating to African situations and problems on academics from the universities central to the system rather than on African academics and universities. In line with this is the large amount of research related to the continent done by academics and universities foreign to the continent. Opportunities are accordingly limited for African academics to become involved in searching for solutions to the problems of the continent and, with this, opportunities for testing their insights to provide knowledge relevant to the African context and to the improvement of the African environment are also limited. African universities naturally suffer by the limitations thus imposed.

Another aspect of this situation is the fact that the African continent is largely agrarian. Improving traditional modes of production is fundamental to effecting an agricultural revolution, which the continent is in critical need of, and to improving the way of life of the large majority of the people who live in the traditional sector and make their living by subsistence farming. This sector is heavily depended on for food and, with the growing informal sector, accounts for much of the continent's economic activity. Understanding and empowerment of these neglected sectors is necessary to self-sustained development.

Africa is in a pre-industrial stage and differs distinctly from the West which is in a post-industrial stage and trying to cope with the new demands of that stage. Africa requires forms and structures in keeping with its realities and will have to create them rather than continue to look to the West for models of development.

The issues which this situation draws into focus have a strong bearing on the identity problem with which African universities have

had to grapple with literally since their incipiency, for practically all of these universities developed mainly from European models, an exceptional few from American models. The AAU, cognizant of the gravity of the identity issue, just five years after its establishment, provided an opportunity for concerted thinking and action on the issue. In an important seminar which it held in 1972 in Accra, Ghana, the AAU brought together academics from on and off the continent, the majority African. The theme of the seminar was Creating the African University: Emerging Issues for the 1970's. Seminar participants agreed that the African university had to be adapted in composition and function to the realities, needs, and demands of the continent. According to their articulation, the African university was to be "accountable to, and serve the vast majority of people who live in rural areas." It was to be "committed to active participation in social transformation, economic modernization, and the training and upgrading of the total human resources, not just of a small elite." It was to include in staff appointments "illiterates, in such areas as African art, music and poetry, who are nonetheless acclaimed experts in their fields."[5]

This seminar was a good first step, but the lofty ideas which grew out of the deliberations were not shared by some academics on the continent. For them, higher education had to conform to the patterns of the Western models they knew firsthand or through studies in institutions shaped by them. Otherwise, they felt that neither they, the African universities, nor their products would be accorded respect. Thus, if the seminar ideals were to be implemented, substantial numbers in and outside of the universities had to accept these ideals and become committed to them. Within the universities, it meant dissemination and discussion of these ideas among all levels of faculty and staff and among students. However, only a few years after this important seminar, the universities began to be caught in the pressures emanating from the volatile political situation and economic crunch which engulfed the continent. Crisis management became largely the order of the day. More time had to be given to day to day operations and strategies for survival and less to issues such as the identity of the African university which challenged for creative conceptualizations

and innovative responses. Thus, the identity issue still looms large and should not be underestimated. It is germane to the reform of higher education in Africa, especially with reference to quality and relevance and how they are defined.

Needless to say, there must be full understanding of the African context in order to get clear ideas and agreement on what the goals of higher education in this context should be. Lack of clear goals and agreement on goals have doomed university reforms in other contexts to failure.

Much of the recent focus for higher education reform has concentrated on governance, university finance, and human resources development. These important issues and their ramifications should be accorded the attention they deserve but should not be allowed to overshadow other important concerns, such as cultural enhancement and knowledge generation.

Regarding human resource development, universities in Africa can claim success during their heyday, albeit the emphasis was mainly on education for the modern sector and for positions in that sector, high-level and middle-level. The deteriorating conditions under which the universities have had to work within the last decade and a half place limitations on the universities for effectively performing this task; nevertheless, there is commitment to the performance of this traditional function of universities. The challenge is for a more inclusive task of human resource development and the issue for clarification is the extent to which this focus should be enlarged to fit the challenges of a scientific age on one hand and the cultural enhancement of the continent on the other.

To use another example, an important and accepted role of African universities is knowledge transmission. What, however, is the role of these universities in the generation of knowledge for transmission? How best can these universities fulfil this role? To what extent does this apply to knowledge for the scientific and technological era? To what extent does this include legitimization and building on indigenous knowledge systems which can aid in empowering the majority of the

people of the continent and improving the African context?

Such issues relating to the complexity of the African situation should be taken into cognizance and clarified as goals for higher education reform in Africa are formulated.

A second obstacle to reform efforts is the political situation on the continent which, for the most part, inhibits freedom of thought, restricts participation of the majority of the people in the political life of their nations, and is repressive. Universities naturally suffer, not merely from undue political interference and infringement on their autonomy, but from an atmosphere which is antithetical to the ethos of universities. Although the forces of democratization are struggling to gain ground, authoritarian governments still dominate the continent. The cases of people in the seats of power paying lip service to democracy as they manipulate to maintain themselves in power and thwart democratic movements bear evidence of the forces of authoritarianism struggling to perpetuate themselves.

Universities have to function in this troubling situation and equip their products to cope with it. Governments have to become more responsive to their people, recognizing that it is their responsibility to pull their countries out of the plight of poverty, disease, and human suffering which requires not only the efforts of governments, but also of universities and other institutions, and their people as well. Perhaps, universities can contribute to building the sensitivities to this situation and to the urgency for cooperative relations between themselves and governments through the continental political, economic, and educational bodies. They can also work with peasant organizations and social movements to help build the strength needed from below to aid democratization.

Effecting the economic conditions which can contribute to fostering political stability is most important. A means to this end is the challenging task of integration of the African markets. Of importance also is the empowerment of the great majority of the people, the goal being not merely to ensure their participation in elections for the

choice of their rulers but also their participation in decision-making which affects their day to day living and their destiny. Linkages can also be built with other institutions which can foster the democratic process, such as the press. By these means, an open atmosphere can be created, facilitating freedom of thought and providing congruence between what the universities teach and what their graduates are able to practice.

The universities are themselves undergoing scrutiny . There are calls for them to challenge and revise inappropriate research paradigms, transform and democratize themselves in their administrative, research, and teaching practice,[6] and let me add, opportunities for access and outreach.

A third obstacle to reform is the lack of readily available funds to facilitate reform efforts. Reliable sources of funds are needed to support the structural changes and flexibility which reform implies, but near-term prospects are few and have to be built up over time. Universities on the continent for the most part have not built up for themselves funds of any consequence to support reform endeavors. Increasing their income-generating capacity and diversifying their sources of funding to include investments and endowments, profit-making ventures, substantial contributions from businesses, industries, and multinationals that work on the continent, alumni/alumnae giving, and tuition and fees is a challenge. Not only will this take time, but the universities face the dilemma that as they must increasingly depend on their own funds and must needs search for and build diversified sources of funding, they lack the administrative and financial capacity to be effective in so doing. Developing that capacity is an urgent step along the way. It should be remembered, however, that the magnitude of the benefits from that capacity will accrue in direct proportion to the improvement of the economic environment of their countries and the region.

African universities have been heavily dependent on government funding. They still are, although this source of funds has shrunk considerably over time, producing uncertainty in funding and leaving

the universities underfunded. Major reasons for the shrinkage in the financial support of the universities by governments include economic recessions countries on the continent experienced during the last decade and a half; the increase by African governments in military spending; and the structural adjustment policies adopted by several countries which have caused government cutbacks in appropriations to the social services, mainly education and health. Blair believes an "essential prerequisite for progress towards financial stability for the universities is a compact between the state and each university which would place the state's funding on a rational and predictable basis."[7] Unless there is commitment on the part of governments to higher education reform, as they recover from economic recessions, and support through rational and predictable funding to universities, adequate funding for reforms may not be forthcoming.

Would international funding agencies be prepared to support reform? This could be a fruitful field for international cooperation and the support of these agencies, but it raises the problem of dependence on external support in a critical area. Moreover, it should be recognized that these agencies have their own agendas and would have to perceive reforms as in line with them or contributing in some way to meeting them.

Here the sticky issue of differences in perceptions based on the different vantage points of donors and leaders of African higher educational institutions is bound to arise. The report of the meeting of the Donors to African Education (DAE) Working Group on Higher Education held in Maputo, Mozambique in November, 1992, bears evidence to this problem. If sensitivity to the variance in perceptions could be achieved, it would be a big step toward collaboration on a more equitable basis and a balanced analysis of the situation under consideration.

Facilitating Higher Education Reform in Africa

Some Considerations

Although there was considerable expansion of African universities during the last decade and a half, further expansion is a fact to be reckoned with. There is a high social demand for access to these universities. One reason is that opportunities at the secondary level have expanded considerably and only a small percentage of the relevant age group is enrolled at the tertiary level, as can be seen from enrollment ratios. In an article in which he speaks of a higher education paradox facing development planners in a number of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, Christopher Colclough makes two revealing concessions regarding enrollment ratios at this level, despite his stance that there should not be too fast a rate of higher education expansion. First, the average enrollment ratio during the early 1980's in thirty-nine countries in Sub-Saharan Africa was only 1.4% of the relevant age group, which is about one-fifth of the average tertiary enrollment for all developing countries, and one-fifteenth of the average ratio for industrialized countries. Second, pointing out that there are dynamic relationships between higher education and economic growth, he suggests that the tiny enrollment ratios at the tertiary level in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is part of the explanation for SSA disappointing economic growth.[8]

Another explanation for the high demand for access is that Africans with high-level professional, scientific, and technical skills are in short supply to governments, businesses, and industries. There is increasing pressure for such persons to be trained in African universities to further cooperative relations among these universities and strengthen their capacities in professional, scientific, and technological areas; make training relevant; and limit per student cost for training.

The third explanation is that the aspirations of people of the continent for higher education are high. For some areas, Thérèse N'Dri Assie-Lumumba attributes this to the population density rise in the

countryside and the desire to substitute education, especially higher education, as an alternative survival strategy for the extended family and kin as agricultural options dissolve.[9]

Expansion of universities has impelled reforms in various countries in the past. It is likely to do so in this region in the future. Among other factors necessitating reforms are the demand for improvement in the quality of higher education and the demand that such education be responsive to the continental urgencies.

A concern then is how the obstacles to reform stated earlier can be removed and consensus for reforms built. Consultation processes, appropriate organizational structures, and management decisions can provide partial answers, but more than technical efficiency in universities is needed. Moreover, whatever the focus, the questions that persist are: What kind of universities do Africans desire? What kind of universities will best meet the needs of the continent? How can what is needed be paid for?

Consultation Processes

Various forms of consultations, concerned with internal and external relations, especially with governments; regional and continental organizations which bring together institutions on the continent; the international donor community; businesses and industries; peasant organizations; and ordinary people are necessary to overcome the obstacles to reform and build the required consensus. Other relations the consultations should be concerned with are the educational system, especially other post-secondary institutions; university graduates; and students. These consultations should involve a large number and range of people in the universities and outside of them. The task least thought of or accepted and most urgent is reaching ordinary people, especially those outside of the modern sector. Although they are presently silent, they have a stake in their universities which can be turned into mutual advantage. The means to a two-way flow of ideas between the universities and themselves needs

to be found. It is necessary to building consensus with them and reversing the present tendency towards their alienation.

Two useful consultation processes are the institutional self-assessment and the sector assessment. A third process for building consensus could be specially designed symposia, seminars, or meetings.

Regarding the latter, the meeting of the DAE Working Group on Higher Education held in Maputo, Mozambique, in November, 1992, is a good illustration. It was a consultation on higher education reform in Africa, involving representatives of donor agencies and key leaders of higher education in the region. There was clearly an attempt to build consensus for higher education reform on the continent.

Another good example is the CODESRIA[10] Symposium on Academic Freedom, Research, and the Social Responsibility of the Intellectual in Africa held at Makerere University, Uganda, in November, 1990. I was fortunate to be a participant.

Organized jointly by CODESRIA, Makerere University, the African Academy of Sciences (AAS), and the Center for Basic Research, (Kampala), the symposium brought together African academics and researchers, based on and off the continent, representatives of international organizations, and of donor agencies in response to the increasing threat to intellectual freedom on the continent, its consequence, the undermining of the wider freedom and rights of intellectuals and the people in general. The symposium provided for sharing ideas and for concerted and coordinated effort to produce an environment that will stimulate creative work and aid in the democratization of Africa's institutions, structures, and processes. It produced consensus for action regarding means of improving the environment for intellectual activity on the continent, a sine qua non to university reform. The Kampala Declaration on Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility is an important outcome of the symposium. CODESRIA's Executive Secretary has indicated that it has been "widely distributed and widely cited."[11]

Turning to the institutional self-assessment, I can also speak first-hand of its merits, as the University of Liberia was involved in an institutional self-assessment for a number of months during 1983 when I was President of the University. This process facilitates sharing of information on a wide basis and consensus-building; it also aids institutional and individual development and encourages team effort. It highlights strengths of the institution and reveals weaknesses.

Universities have been characterized as resistant to change and their faculty key to such resistance. Yet it is generally agreed that initiative for reform of African universities must come from the universities themselves. The institutional self-assessment gives the university a splendid chance to begin with itself and to use objective measures in appraising its work and in planning its future. The self-assessment provides for the involvement of faculty and staff at all levels and students. Its focus is the institution and its mission and how the work of various units and individuals contributes to the effective functioning of the institution. As the mission of the institution is the rationale for and guides the work of the institution, it is clarified for the participants and, if necessary, modified by them. For example, during the University of Liberia self-assessment, its mission as a university in a developing country came clearly to the forefront. Setting the university in context contributed to understanding not only the challenges to the institution but also the complex Sub-Saharan region in which African universities function.

As the focus of the self-assessment is the institution, sharing of ideas is key as policies are considered and agreement is reached regarding institutional priorities. This is one way that relations between administrators, faculty, and staff can be held in proper perspective, and the chances of conflict minimized. A measure of success is achieved in building commitment to the institution at all levels of faculty and staff.

As in any institutional self-assessment, attention to the institution's financial state was a critical element in the University of Liberia self-assessment. Dealing squarely with this area helps to build

awareness internally and in the eyes of the public of the fundamental relationship between funding and what the university can offer and do.

For some time, the government in Liberia, as governments in other countries in the region, was perceived by many as a certain source for the flow of funds to universities, but the cold reality of shrinking funds from governments to universities even as costs of operating the institutions rocketed, had to be recognized and faced by all - the governments themselves, the public, administrators, faculty, staff, and students. It is amazing how this revelation in some cases produced the sensitivity which resulted in moderation of the demands of students for personal benefits such as housing and food.

Severe cutbacks in appropriation to universities has made income generation by the universities compelling and, with that, the tasks of identifying and tapping new sources of funds. A big consideration is how to adjust the operating costs of the institution and its plans for desired new programs and expansion to its capability to meet the costs of them. A related consideration is what new capabilities are needed to help the institution meet such challenges and how these will be obtained.

The institutional self-assessment deals also with the institution's external relations, especially with government. How well has the institution served the public and how can its contributions be given visibility and appropriately valued? How can government cooperate with the university in identifying areas of need so that research and training programs can be organized to respond to those needs? Contributions of the university to the welfare of the nation and its people, measured in terms of actual performance, represent important means of gaining public confidence in the institution's functioning and gaining consensus from the public for its ongoing programs and activities and its future plans.

The private sector is the other important aspect of external relations dealt with in the institutional self-assessment. It is crucial to providing the diversified income sources the universities need to

help overcome the obstacle of not readily available funds to support reform.

An integral relationship has not developed between African universities and businesses and industries on the continent, largely because multinationals dominate the continent and are linked less to African economies than the economies of the nations in which they originate and have their centers. Nevertheless, efforts have to be put forth to forge an appropriate relationship with multinationals and with indigenous business entrepreneurs and industries. Not only can they become an important source of funds as universities seek to diversify university sources of funds, but, as users of university products, they can provide feedback for improving university training programs. Major considerations could be:

1. building a local donor community, which could include other local groups such as alumni/alumnae, relations with whom will be dealt with briefly later (see page 25);[12]

2. investing in universities to enable them to increase their scientific and technological capacity and develop other ways of responding effectively to their environment.

Whether In connection with an internal self-assessment, a sector review, or otherwise, representatives of businesses and industries can be included in special seminars and workshops on higher education reform to build consensus and develop a mutually rewarding relationship. The universities need their financial support; also they could become partners of the universities to make provisions for students to acquire valuable experience while they are still in school, for example, by establishing co-ops. Moreover, businesses and industries need the products of the universities and inputs for improving their operating efficiency, work environments, and the larger environment.

Another way to get businesses and industries involved is to have a representative number of the members of Councils/Boards drawn from

this group and hopefully get the Councils/Boards assertive with respect to policies to improve university administration and governance.

The other consultation process is the sector assessment, in this case, the education sector assessment, which brings the university into close contact with the Government and promotes cooperation between the university and the Government. Initiated by the Government, it involves the various ministries, agencies, and institutions in the sector, and is a good way to build consensus.

The sector review allows the university to participate with relevant government agencies in determining the strengths and weaknesses of the sector and in national development planning. In the process, the university gets to understand and appreciate its linkages not only within the educational sector of which it is a part, but also with other sectors, for example, agriculture, labor, and health. Thus, the university not only develops linkages with government, but is better able to maintain them.

Coordinated by a senior government official either from the Ministry of Planning or the President's Office, the sector assessment has as major concerns higher education policy, priorities for the functioning of the sector, and resource allocation.

Organizational Structures

In order to overcome the obstacles to reform discussed earlier and facilitate consensus building for higher education reform in Africa, existing organizational structures would have to be modified or new ones created. Key concepts to come to grips with are: power, autonomy, accountability, common goals, democratization, information sharing, flexibility, and openmindedness. These need to be applied to relationships within any given African university; between that university and its government in particular, but its other publics as well; among universities on the continent; and between African universities, scholars, researchers and the international donor community and the universities and scholars in the North.

Let us begin with an existing structure, the Council/Board, which is the supreme policy making body in the existing hierarchical structure of the universities. There is a vying for power within that organization and one answer that has been suggested is proportionate representation of the different constituencies of the university on the Council/Board. As big, if not a bigger problem, is how the Council/Board increases its power so that it has actual control of affairs of the university it is supposed to direct. Several examples of the weakness of Councils/Boards could be cited, but one should suffice and that is the glaring one of the pervasive appointment powers states have regarding appointment of senior university administrators and faculty. An inner look and self-assessment is needed here. This might include a comparative focus on Councils/Boards in other contexts, what roles they have evolved, how power sharing between faculty and administrators has been achieved, and what realities in the environment have contributed thereto.[13]

A major focus is the state, but also the university's other publics, especially the business community. The Council/Board would need to set up the necessary liaison or negotiating machinery to improve university/state relations, work out with states a rational basis for state funding of universities and, with business, alternative sources of funding universities. This initiative should include sensitizing states to the need for the formulation of social policies and establishing a broad social policy framework in which universities can work.

Flexible organizational arrangements are necessary to increase South-South academic linkages, with a view to strengthening the community of African scholars and increasing the production of knowledge relevant to the continent. These should take precedence over North-South academic linkages unless the North-South linkages are conceptualized so that there is equity in the linkages and these would result in some capacity building for African universities.

The South-South linkages could include support for the working groups and other existing networks of researchers, which are

coordinated or supported by CODESRIA and launching of new networks under CODESRIA's support. They could also include establishing teaching pools among universities, an idea once broached in 1983 by the then Secretary General of the AAU, Professor Levy Makany. Such pools are perhaps most needed in disciplines where the pattern on the continent reflects understaffing in those disciplines in the universities. I recall a Professor of Geology at the University of Liberia remarking sometime during the 1980's that understaffing in geology was a problem in all of the universities on the continent he knew of. No doubt, there has been an increase since that time in disciplines in universities on the continent where the situation is as bad.

Strengthening interlinkages between the continental academic and scientific organizations, for example, the AAU, CODESRIA, the AAS, and the African Network of Scientific and Technological Institutions (ANSTI) and between these bodies and the universities. There might be special liaison committees and established benchmarks for exploring and increasing meaningful interlinkages. Building awareness of the facilities of these organizations and particular strengths which they have that could be shared should be an objective. For example, CODESRIA's Documentation Center which has the largest social science data base, used, however, by only a few African scholars and institutions, could become more utilized.

A next step for interlinkages would be between these academic and scientific organizations, the universities, and the Pan-African political and economic organizations, for example, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the Economic Community for Africa (ECA), and the regional organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). A major objective would be to make visible steps toward achieving the self-sustained development for which the continent is striving, for example, integration of the African markets or decreasing the tendency to desertification.

Another flexible organizational arrangement is needed to build the community of African scholars visualized in the AAU 1972 seminar by

including in staff appointments or establishing institutional links with illiterates who are acclaimed experts in their fields. This would help to build consensus by firmly linking universities with indigenous communities and according them the appreciation and respect they deserve.

Management Actions

Certain management actions are necessary to ensure that universities function efficiently, build consensus, and contribute to removing one or more of the obstacles to reform referred to earlier. Restating as goals some of the key concepts mentioned in the preceding section, and adding others, the goals to be achieved are: autonomy, accountability, coordination of efforts toward achieving common goals, democratization, financial stability, and efficiency and fairness in administration. Five actions that I consider urgent are discussed briefly below. The first, instituting proper financial management, and the fifth, establishing a planning unit, contribute both to the removal of obstacles and to efficiency and accountability in management. While the others do not address the issue of removing obstacles, they promote efficiency and fairness in management. They also contribute to devolving responsibility for many of the bureaucratic operations of the institution to junior staff, giving senior administrators and faculty more opportunities to concentrate on the challenges to the universities in this setting.

1. Instituting Proper Financial Management

Public confidence in the financial capacity and accountability of universities is key to maintaining existing sources of funds and opening new ones at home and in international donor circles. The universities have a number of critical needs, ranging from investments in improving deteriorating structures and building new ones; acquisition of scientific equipment and library materials; and even funds for stabilization of salaries and other benefits for faculty and other staff.

Proper financial management is critical to the reform process. It aids in building the financial capacity and accountability needed by these universities. Institutional autonomy is cherished by universities. Proper financial management is necessary to ensuring that autonomy by building the financial capacity for universities to hire, support, and retain high calibre faculty, provide them the quality environment in which to work, and allow independent decisions regarding the institution's programs and activities.

2. Computerizing the Records of Students

The sharp increase in numbers of students enrolled in universities over the last decade and a half and the high number of applicants to the universities require that the record system of students be computerized. This is important to ensuring accuracy and speed in admissions, registration, and maintenance of the records of students, and in making decisions that are based on these records. Computerizing the records of students also leads to efficiency in a vital Office, with its concomitant of winning public confidence and aiding the consensus-building process.

Needless to say, public confidence is as much built by efficient and accurate records as it is destroyed by inaccurate records and the ambiguities and doubts that these create.

3. Instituting Overall Personnel Policies

This is a critical area, especially in the African context. As African universities have expanded in size, they have had to acquire a large number of support staff, drawing from a limited pool of qualified persons and being subject to political, ethnic, kinship, and other pressures. Policies for employment, for example, provide an objective basis for hiring and minimize the chances of succumbing to such pressures.

Personnel policies serve the functions of promoting efficiency and safeguarding the interests of staff through proper remuneration, opportunities for promotion, satisfactory conditions of work, provision of security through benefits such as health and accident insurance, life insurance, and retirement. Such policies are needed as much for support staff as for faculty and senior administrators. They contribute to securing efficiency in operating and building the support structures to facilitate efficient functioning of the academic structures.

Manuals of rules and regulations are useful in keeping staff informed and can serve as important guides to them. One such manual, "A Manual of Rules and Regulations for Non-Academic Staff", developed by the Personnel Office of the University of Liberia during the early 1980's, proved to be valuable.

Operating on the basis of clear policies not only promotes efficiency, but it creates an atmosphere of fairness and reduces conflicts among staff. It aids consensus building within the university. Moreover, a basically satisfied staff of hundreds of people is an asset in university relations with the public, which can be used to advantage in consensus building for reforms.

4. Establishing a University Relations Office

The growth in size and complexity of universities in Africa require that each university finds the means of keeping all of its constituent parts informed at all times on issues of importance to the institution. The importance of information in facilitating consensus building can not be overestimated. This is one function that a University Relations Office can serve. This Office can also serve as a liaison between the University and the Press and the institution's other publics.

Through newsletters at regular intervals, weekly or monthly, for example, this Office keeps the entire university informed of developments affecting the university and important events on

the various Campuses.

By the ideas and issues it selects to bring to public attention, it highlights university interests and concerns, informs of solid accomplishments, and indicates priorities and challenges. This is important to maintaining interest in the university, a means of building consensus.

A University Relations Office is not meant to be a propaganda medium or a mere channel for a one-way flow of information. As it provides information, it is to be like a listening post as well, sensitizing the university to the concerns of its publics.

5. Establishing a Planning Unit.

This Office consolidates the planning activities of the major professional areas of the university and helps to keep the eyes of a university on the future. Through this Office, the University engages in continuous self-assessment, weighing its accomplishments against changing goals and realities. It helps the university invest in itself and its renewal through the process of staff development, investments in various capacities and infrastructure.

A planning unit enables the university to maintain its links with various governmental agencies and public bodies in the complex task of national planning and thus remain a valuable part of education sectoral planning and national planning. It provides the buttressing for the university's links with the World Bank and other international donor agencies.

This Office has a lot to contribute in terms of consensus building for higher education reform in Africa within the university, at the national level, and the international level, and in providing an understanding of the context in which the university functions, thus contributing to the removal of the first obstacle to reform mentioned earlier.

Key Actors and Interest Groups

The whole nation has a stake in the nation's educational institutions, especially its higher educational institutions. Thus, there is a wide group of people, organizations, and interest groups with which consensus should be built for university reform. Included are those directly related to the university: members of its Council/Board; administrators; faculty; other staff; students; and graduates. Next, are the educational institutions, especially the other higher education institutions. Then, there are governments; businesses and industries; professional local and national organizations, including peasant organizations; and the public in general. At the international level, there are universities; international organizations; and international donors. Each has a role in the reform process.

The role of some key actors and interest groups emerged as the discussion proceeded in the preceding section, "Facilitating Higher Education Reform in Africa". Because of this and also due to limitations of space, in this section, only students, governments, graduates, other higher education institutions, and international donor agencies will be discussed. The focus will be primarily on students and governments. This is not meant, however, to downplay the significance of any group.

Students

Students are an important group to reckon with in any attempt to gain consensus for university reform. Student activism has been a powerful influence in Africa and other third world contexts. It has caused disruptions and changes in the operations of universities. Moreover, not only have universities been affected. Student activism has gone beyond the walls of the universities and led to the overthrow of governments.

Student activism may be sparked by issues directly related to their personal welfare, for example, food, living conditions, grants, loans, tuition hikes, or they may be sparked by issues related to political and

social conditions in their countries and the national welfare. In many instances, student movements have served as the "conscience" of their nations, especially where there have not been strong political institutions to hold governments in check. Student activism has been effective when aimed at political change and improved social conditions in the larger environment.

Much of the focus on students has naturally been concerned with student activism. Needless to say, no remedies can be prescribed. In fact, to the extent that student activism arises as a response to unsatisfactory political and social conditions in African countries, it is likely to be a potent force as long as these conditions persist.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to focus on other elements related to students, for example, their own development, their role in the university, their link with their parents and communities, their role in national development. An objective is to develop in them a sensitivity to the fact that rights imply obligations. Students are such a vital part of academic life, no doubt, all universities in Africa have an Office or, at least, someone in charge of students and their affairs. However, many others have to assist with the development of students - professors and other faculty in particular. Academic work, campus life, and community and national service should be related to foster the development of students into mature and responsible individuals.

Building consensus with students for university reform will be difficult, especially if their interests are affected. In the case of reform in African universities, their interests will be affected. For example, there are suggestions for the introduction of tuition and fees, where they did not exist, and reduction or elimination of subsidized places in residential halls. With an increasing number of students being drawn from low-income backgrounds, meeting such expenses could pose real problems. Moreover, this could affect the access to universities of students of low-income backgrounds, returning to an elitist orientation in universities. Such savings measures for universities could, therefore, fuel student discontent. There are no easy answers to managing the situation so as to try to steer students

away from discontent and instead build consensus for reform by providing opportunities for them to contribute to removing obstacles to reform. Some possibilities to consider are: having students participate in decision-making, so that they can understand the present situation of their universities; providing more opportunities for practical experiences to challenge students in their own or other communities; encouraging students in entrepreneurial activities; and providing more opportunities at the universities for students to work. A brief discussion on each of these follows.

1. Students and Democratization

Democratization is a burning issue for students. It will become more so as the forces of democratization struggle to gain a hold on the continent. Some questions this raises are: How best can students participate in decision-making in their universities? To what extent would this mean democratization of university decision-making structures to give them representation or effective liaison between the Student Association which provide them self-government and the university decision-making structures?

2. Integration of Students into Their Communities

How can the energies of students be harnessed to effect changes in the very situations in their environment which they find unsatisfactory? What would this mean for parents? How can students be used to improve the work environment in the public and private sectors to help make their practical experiences meaningful? What liaison can be established between students and peasant organizations for mutual learning experiences? What programs and services would universities have to institutionalize, e.g., national service, community service, and how would the cost for them be met? Encouraging students to live in nearby communities rather than residential halls could be viewed from a dimension other than the cost factor. It could contribute to integrating students into their communities.

3. Students and Entrepreneurship

As universities look forward to producing more graduates, more thought will have to be given to the employment market and to the utilization of these graduates. Already, there are numerous complaints about graduates being unable to gain employment. One way to help alter the situation is to encourage student entrepreneurships to enable them to reenforce their knowledge in their specializations, employ themselves on graduation and contribute to job creation. Student organizations which can aid in this process should be encouraged. I recall positive results from student initiated and managed associations which provided the students opportunities for experience and work related to their specializations. Among them was the Agriculture Students Cooperative at the University of Liberia, formed during the early 1980's. It was composed entirely of students with a major in Agriculture. Their objectives included demonstrating the principles of scientific farming and producing food which was sold to the institution for the feeding of students.

4. Campus Life and Students

Classrooms, laboratories and other experimental areas, and libraries are the regular places of learning for students. Quality instruction should always be evident in these areas and students can be kept aware of how demands from the non-academic in the face of scare financial resources can lead to quality decline.

All of the campus should, however, abound with learning experiences. For example, the dormitories can be more than mere places to reside. They can be centers of learning as well and places where all share in work. A variety of planned activities can contribute to this end. In addition, universities can adopt a work and study concept, thereby increasing opportunities for students to work while in college.

Most important to all that has been said regarding students, their development and relationships, is that there should always be open lines of communication between students and administrators right up to the President/Vice Chancellor/Rector. Informal discussion can contribute a lot to creating the atmosphere for students to air their views and build trust. The goal is not only consensus building. It also includes helping students recognize their responsibility to contribute to improving their own situation and that of their country and their continent.

Governments

A very important step in the reform process is improving the relationship between governments and the universities. Governments are most important to the success of reforms both because they provide a substantial portion of university budgets (more than 85%) and because they create the political climate which is either conducive to university education or stifling. The importance of an enabling environment on the continent for intellectual activities can not be overestimated and Government should always be sensitized to its role in this connection.

Reference has already been made above (see page 15) to how the Councils/Boards of the universities can set up the necessary liaison to try to improve relations with their respective governments and try to work out rational bases for state funding of universities.

It seems, however, that a number of other actions would be necessary. For example, links developed through participation in education sector reviews, which are initiated and coordinated by government officials, should be maintained with the different government ministries, agencies and functionaries. Where policies were evolved and decisions reached regarding resource allocations these should be used as reference points in negotiating funds for universities.

Cooperation with government can be furthered through a more

permanent arrangement, an Intermediary Coordinating Agency, perhaps better known as a National Council for Higher Education. This formally established government organization coordinates the work of higher education institutions in a given country. One of the best known on the continent is the Nigerian National Universities Commission.

There is a need, I believe, for interlinkages between the continent's universities, its scientific and academic organizations and its political and economic organizations, as I have mentioned on pages 16-17 above. The main goal would be to have as a focal part of the regular agenda of the political and economic organizations, the OAU especially, how the universities and the scientific and academic bodies can put their expertise to work on specific projects and in measurable ways to move the continent toward the self-sustained development often talked about. Much would be learned from the challenges of such a venture and it might contribute a lot to creating an environment conducive to intellectual work on the continent.

Graduates

Graduates should be important links between the universities and the public. As products of the universities, they are their best representatives and should be their main advocates. However, associations of graduates, often called Alumni Associations, have not had, as far as I am aware, a strong role in university development on the African continent. It is important in these difficult times for universities on the continent that graduates be enlisted in the efforts to build consensus for university reform. They can organize themselves into strong organizations which can help to remove obstacles to reform. Here is their challenge.

Some possibilities they can consider for making their contributions are:

1. Organize annual alumni/alumnae giving and become regular donors to their Alma Mater.

2. Spearhead the forming of local donor communities and become a part of them.

3. Aid in promoting appropriate relations with business communities to which many graduates belong.

4. Explore innovations in housing arrangements for students and invest in them. As universities consider the possibility of reduction in subsidized housing for students by governments, this should be an area of promise.

Other Higher Education Institutions

This paper has concentrated on universities, which are at the apex of the educational system in their respective countries on the continent. However, the need for other higher education institutions to be taken into consideration and their role highlighted can not be gainsaid. In fact, there can be no real consensus for higher education reform without a focus on these institutions. An examination should be made of the relationship between universities and other higher education institutions in the various countries on the continent. The tendency to regard as inferior these institutions, which are mainly involved in teacher education, technological or vocational specializations must be eschewed. This legacy, found in many former colonial territories, needs to be reassessed. It hardly needs to be reiterated that Africa is short of skilled persons in education, the sciences, and technology. The teachers and the facilities for training such persons should be wisely used.

Universities can make a valuable contribution to strengthening the educational system not only at the primary and secondary levels, but at the tertiary level as well. Consultations are needed between the universities and other higher education institutions in order to weigh the strengths of these institutions and to consider such possibilities as transfer of credits, sharing of facilities, and even joint programs, where feasible. Consensus for higher education reform requires that meaningful relationships between the universities and other higher education institutions be established. When this occurs, sound

decisions can be reached as to whether to adapt the American pattern of differentiated institutions or some other pattern which might emerge from this situation.

International Donor Agencies

International donor agencies have been at work on this continent for some time. They have an important part to play in the revitalization of African universities and the reform of higher education on the continent. Apart from funds, they bring a wealth of experience from their diverse backgrounds. While the financial constraints the various African states and governments are facing necessitate financial inputs from these agencies, this is a splendid opportunity for them to recognize their responsibility to make investments to redress imbalances in our interdependent world which plague African nations but will increasingly affect the industrialized world as well.

Naturally, the policies of donor agencies and their experience will influence their approach to funding and choice of projects, but the needs of the universities and their related scientific and academic bodies, as perceived by their representatives, should also be an important factor in defining the nature and size of support. A major challenge is to move toward a more equitable basis for collaboration between donor agencies and their African partners. Recognizing that perceptions differ and trying to harmonize them would be an important step.

In the new directions these agencies are charting which include strengthening the research capacity of the universities and investing in their institutional development, some of what I have suggested should fit, for example, flexible organizational arrangements which will increase South-South academic linkages. However, what space is created for bolder innovations will determine whether support can be provided toward building the community of scholars visualized in the AAU 1972 seminar, thus linking universities firmly with indigenous communities.

Summary

The focus of this paper is building consensus for higher education reform in Africa. I began by identifying three obstacles to reform:

1. Lack of understanding of the complex African context which could result in setting the wrong goals for reform;

2. A political situation which inhibits freedom of thought and restricts the political participation of the majority of the continent's people;

3. Lack of readily available funds to support reform.

Various ways of removing these obstacles, thereby facilitating higher education reform and building consensus for it, were explored under the captions: consultation processes, organizational structures, and management decisions. In the process, some treatment was given to a few key actors and interest groups as well as their roles in reform and consensus-building. A section devoted to key actors and interest groups followed, with the main focus on students and governments.

The paper is structured by a technical efficiency, institutional building approach. As this can only supply partial answers in this situation, I included a cultural enhancement slant as well.

ENDNOTES

[1]Philip G. Altbach, Higher Education in the Third World: Themes and Variations, New York: Advent Books, Inc., 1987, page 181.

[2]Ibid., page 196.

[3]Ibid., pages 205-206.

[4]United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programmes for Socio-Economic Recovery and Transformation (AAF-SAP)", E/ECA/CM. 15/6 Rev. 3, page 14.

The other dimensions are: the integration of the production structures and the integration of the African markets.

[5]T.M. Yesufu, Creating the African University: Emerging Issues in the 1970s, Published for the Association of African Universities, Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1973, page 84.

[6]Ayesha M. Imam and Amina Mama, "The Role of Academics in Limiting and Expanding Academic Freedom", CODESRIA Symposium on Academic Freedom, Research and the Social Responsibility of the Intellectual in Africa", Kampala, Uganda, November 26-29, 1990, pages 35-36.

[7]Robert D. D. Blair, Financial Diversification and Income Generation of African Universities, AFTED Technical Note No. 2, Education and Training Division, The World Bank, Washington, D.C., August, 1992, page 4.

[8]Ibid., page 272.

[9]Cited from N'Dri Thérèse Assie-Lumumba, L'Enseignement Superieur en Afrique Francophone, Consultancy Report, World Bank, Africa Technical Department, Education and Training Division, October, 1992, Washington, D.C. In William S. Saint, Universities in Africa: Strategies for Stabilization and Revitalization, World Bank Technical Paper No. 194, Africa Technical Department Series, Washington, D.C., The World Bank, 1992, pages 106-107.

[10]CODESRIA is the acronym for the Council for the Development of Social Research in Africa. One of the most effective of the continental professional bodies, CODESRIA was established in 1973. It is linked to African universities through their research institutes and social science faculties. Its objective is to undertake research in the field of development from a perspective more relevant to the needs of the African people than the traditional orthodoxy.

[11]"Report of the Executive Secretary", CODESRIA Bulletin, nos. 1&2, 1992, Dakar, Senegal, page 5.

[12]A variation of this idea, advanced by Akilu Habte, calls for the creation of a special fund (in the nature of a foundation) to be contributed to by external assisters and donors in Ethiopia (local donors) "to finance, on a small scale, various kind of development initiatives, notably of a research character."

See Akilu Habte, "Higher Education in Ethiopia in the 1970's and Beyond: A Survey of Some Issues and Responses." In Education and Development Reconsidered, edited by F. Champion Ward. The Bellagio Conference Papers, New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974 , page 232.

[13] For a useful comparative discussion, see Martin Trow, "Comparative Reflections on Leadership in Higher Education", European Journal of Education , vol. 20, nos. 2-3, 1985, pages 146-149.

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